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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003299

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES: KEEPING PRESSURE ON BURMA

REF: A. STATE 137644

[1](#)B. MANILA 3263
[1](#)C. MANILA 3268

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The ongoing crisis in Burma continues to command high-level interest in Philippine government and media circles. President Arroyo repeated calls for restoration of democracy and the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, while condemning the junta's harsh, repressive measures. Philippine legislators also condemned the junta's repression and called for Burma's democratization. The Embassy remains closely engaged with Philippine interlocutors in urging further Philippine government action, both unilateral and via the auspices of ASEAN. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Following ASEAN's initial condemnation, on the margins of UN meetings in New York, of Burma's violent crackdown on peaceful protesters, President Arroyo on September 29 reiterated her earlier call for Burma to restore democracy and release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi. Several Philippine legislators introduced resolutions on Burma in the Philippine Congress. Resolution 260, introduced by Representatives Hontiveros-Baraquel, Tanada, and Climaco, condemned the violent dispersal and arrest of peaceful pro-democracy protesters, and called for Burma's democratization. Similar sentiments were echoed in Resolution 262, submitted by Representatives Ocampo, Casino, and others. These followed a resolution introduced by Senate Minority Leader Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. and passed by the Philippines Senate, urging the United Nations Security Council, European Union, and ASEAN to influence the junta to end its brutal repression and institute democratic governance; Pimentel's resolution also called for the suspension of Burma's ASEAN membership and, if necessary, its expulsion from the organization.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Notwithstanding several high-profile local scandals that have drawn widespread media attention, events in Burma continue to attract significant coverage in Philippine media. The Philippine Daily Inquirer, the Philippine Star, as well as other leading dailies and broadcast media have featured strongly-worded editorials; an October 2 Inquirer editorial cartoon portrayed the Burmese junta as an ugly and violent dragon, strangling human rights while trampling protesters. Philippine Star columnist Alex Magno wrote October 2 that China must take a more active role in what he characterized as the "endgame" developing on the streets of Burma.

[1](#)4. (U) In October 2 remarks at the School for Advanced International Studies, former Philippine President Fidel Ramos (1992-1998) dispensed with his prepared text and spoke extemporaneously about Burma. Ramos conceded that ASEAN's

policy of constructive engagement has been less than successful, but that in any event ASEAN's status as a non-binding forum of equals offered little real leverage to influence events in Burma. Ramos went on to opine that the military leadership would have to be included along with civil society in any new system of government, and that the economic well-being of its citizens was key to longterm stability in Burma.

15. (U) The few Burmese nationals residing in the Philippines support the efforts of the Philippine government in pressuring the Burmese junta to refrain from violence and implement democratic reforms. Spokesman Egoy Bans of the Free Burma Coalition-Philippines (FBC), a loose-knit group of pro-democracy individuals and nongovernmental organizations, explained that most Burmese in the Philippines preferred to keep a low profile out of fear of reprisals against family members still in Burma. Group members have held daily protests in front of the Burmese Embassy, but avoided having their faces shown on camera. Burmese FBC members have spoken publicly of the inspiration provided by Buddhist monks, and the appreciation they felt at the Philippine government's proactive and vocal stance in advocating for democracy in Burma. Activists belonging to the Asia Pacific Solidarity Coalition (APSOC) demonstrated October 1 in front of the Japanese consulate in Davao, Mindanao, lighting incense while burning Burmese flags and photos of junta strongman Gen. Than Shwe.

16. (C) The Ambassador has used several opportunities to speak publicly on Burma, and remained in close contact with Malacanang Palace, keeping our Philippine interlocutors informed of U.S. moves to tighten financial and other sanctions against regime leaders, and underscoring the need for a strong and unified stance on the part of the

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international community. In an October 3 breakfast with newly-arrived Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Makoto Katsura, Ambassador Kenney underscored U.S. concern at events in Burma, and urged Katsura to press for greater Japanese engagement on Burma in his discussions with Filipino officials.

17. (C) COMMENT: The Philippine government's proactive stance with regard to the Burma crisis no doubt springs in part from the Philippines' own experience with the 1986 "People Power" movement that deposed President Ferdinand Marcos. Post will continue to urge our host-country counterparts to press for a democratic and nonviolent outcome in Burma.
KENNEY